

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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Though the sages tell us, "Know thyself," some may find this inadvisable; others may require a proper introduction; and certain individuals may prefer to look for entertainment elsewhere.



Put Together A Man

by Steve O'Connell

SERGEANT WALTERS faced the Police Academy class. "As far as we know, we've never seen him, and yet we think we know what the bomber is and what he looks like." He smiled. "All we have to do is find him."

He turned to the blackboard and chalked the numerals. "Four bombs have exploded. Three people have been killed. Six suffered

major injuries and twenty-three minor."

His eyes went back to the officers seated before him. "You have often heard that you cannot judge a book by its cover, and yet we find that criminals, within certain crime areas, are often remarkably alike mentally, emotionally, and even physically."

Sergeant Walters glanced at the

wall clock. It was three minutes after eight A.M. "We know, for instance, that petty check forgers usually have a strong desire to be apprehended and *returned* to prison. They find a certain type of homogeneous society more congenial than the world at large."

The sergeant was a thin man in an impeccably tailored and pressed uniform. "And we know certain things about bombers." He turned to the blackboard again and wrote. "There are approximately 4,000,000 people in this metropolitan area."

He crossed out that figure and put "2,000,000" underneath.

Then he smiled. "We can immediately eliminate approximately 2,000,000 people. The bomber is a male."

I examined the contact points. They were clean and free of corrosion and the timing mechanism worked perfectly.

I nodded to myself. Yes, the failure hadn't been mechanical. The flashlight batteries were to blame. They had been just too weak to create the necessary voltage for detonation.

Usually the date of effective use is stamped on the cardboard casing, but the ones I had purchased this time were an inferior brand and had probably been lying on

that display counter for some time.

My sister Paula's sharp voice searched down the basement stairs. "Harold, breakfast's on the table."

I put a dust cover over the bomb, snapped out the light over my workbench, and went upstairs.

"Wash your hands," my mother said. "You've got dirt all over them."

I went to the bathroom and when I returned, I sat down at the table. "I'm not too hungry this morning, mother."

"You eat all of your breakfast," she directed. "There's nothing like a good breakfast to start the day. Drink your orange juice . . ."

"We can eliminate perhaps a million and a half more people," Sergeant Walters said. "The bomber is an adult and he is between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five."

One of the front row students raised his hand. "What about the Johnson boy? He was just nineteen."

"True enough, O'Brien," the sergeant conceded. "But in his case he bombed only police stations. Nothing else. He had been in trouble since the age of twelve and he formed the opinion that all the police hated and persecuted him and he struck back at them. But only youth is so blunt and direct."

Walters put the chalk back on the blackboard tray and wiped his fingers with a white handkerchief. "However in this case we have a bomber who strikes out indiscriminately. He leaves his packages in subways, in buses, in any place where people tend to congregate."

O'Brien was red-haired and had a slight squint. "But why particularly must he be between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five?"

"All our experiences with this type of a crime lead us to that conclusion," Walters shrugged. "We don't know exactly why their age is confined to that period, but we rather suspect that before forty-five they are optimistic that their troubles will resolve themselves, and after sixty-five they simply don't care."

My sister reads the paper at the breakfast table. "Nothing more about the bombings on the front page," she said.

I put down my empty orange juice glass. "Why should there be? There hasn't been a bombing in eight days."

"Harold," my mother said. "What do you want for your birthday?"

"Mother, I'm going to be forty-six. I think it's really about time

we forgot about my birthday."

"I believe in asking people what they'd like for their birthdays," my mother said. "That way they get what they want. I think you could use a couple of white shirts."

Paula turned to the inside of the paper. "Here's something, but it's only a re-hash."

"Don't use so much sugar, Harold," my mother said.

Paula would have been supremely happy as a suffragist. "Why does everybody think that it has to be a man?"

I sipped my coffee. "Because people think that women have gentler, finer natures."

Paula glared at me. "Are you *trying* to be sarcastic?"

"Children," my mother said. "I'll have no squabbling at the breakfast table. Paula, put that paper away."

O'Brien raised his hand again. "Why couldn't it be a woman?"

The sergeant smiled. "Women may endanger society by carrying typhoid, but they do not carry bombs."

Sergeant Walters brushed chalk dust from his cuff. "We can safely speculate further. The bomber is a bachelor. He probably lives with his mother, or with older sisters, or aunts. He is a man no one par-

ticularly notices, but when he is noticed it is only because he seems to be so polite, so considerate of others. He is always willing to do little favors. He probably doesn't smoke and he almost never drinks."

O'Brien grinned. "I'd think he'd take a few drops to build up his courage to plant the bombs."

The sergeant shook his head. "No. His type either becomes sick or sleepy if it has a drink. He is a plump man, a pampered man."

"Why would he want to kill innocent people?"

"He doesn't think of them at all. He isn't striking at them. He thinks that in some way he's hitting back at the company that fired him, or the banker he thinks cheated him, or at the firm that failed to give him the promotion he thought he deserved."

"This evening we'll go over to Uncle Martin's," my mother said. "We haven't seen him for a week and we must remember to pay him regular visits."

"Uncle Martin is old and boring," Paula said.

My mother poured coffee. "I know, Paula, but we must remember that he has no interests but us and his Turkish baths."

"I may have to work late to-

night, mother," I said. "I have to finish the Evans account today and I don't know if I can before five."

Paula smiled thinly. "I heard that Corrigan was promoted last week. I gather they passed over you again."

"I gather they did," I said dryly.

"Politics," my mother said.

"You're almost forty-six," Paula said. "Do you think you'll ever amount to anything?"

"We have our hopes."

"You know what?" Paula said. "You just didn't have any backbone. That's why you didn't get ahead."

"You let people step on you," my mother agreed. "You let them take advantage of your good nature. Corrigan got the job you should have had."

"It doesn't make any difference to me now," I said. "And Corrigan's a good man." But I didn't believe that. If ever a man lacked accounting ability, he was the one. The promotion was sheer office politics. I wondered if it were the same in every firm.

"Eat all of your bacon and eggs, Harold," my mother said.

Paula laughed wickedly. "He's a butterball already."

"I am not a butterball," I said.

"Do we—does the depart-

ment—have anything concrete?" O'Brien asked. "I mean, like clues? Something besides just speculation?"

Sergeant Walters was faintly irritated. "Besides 'speculation,' we have nothing."

"No fingerprints?"

Walters laughed. "If we had fingerprints, do you think that the bomber would still be at large?"

"I just meant that maybe there were fingerprints and we just didn't have a record of them anywhere. Even in Washington."

"No. There were no fingerprints. We examined every bomb scrap we could find. And the bits of wrapping paper and the fragments of string told us nothing."

O'Brien pursued the subject. "Weren't the Tyson bombings solved by fingerprints?"

Walters nodded. "Yes. But in that case we recovered a whole bomb—one that had failed to explode. We found a thumb and a forefinger print on one of the flashlight batteries."

The sergeant thought about the case for a moment. "They weren't Tyson's prints. However, they belonged to the clerk in a hardware store where Tyson had purchased the batteries. We traced the clerk and then simply waited and investigated any customer who purchased flashlight batteries."

Walters grinned. "Tyson was fifty-two, plump, mild, and lived with two maiden aunts. In his basement, we found a roll of butcher's wrapping paper and the last piece torn from it had been used to wrap the bomb which sent him to the chair. The edges matched perfectly."

Sergeant Walters sighed. "If only we could get hold of one of this bomber's contraptions before it exploded."

There are certain physical types which quite naturally require a few extra pounds. I am certain I am one of them. "Just what makes you think you're such a joy to behold?" I asked Paula. "You're tall and skinny and forty-two and I support you."

Two spots of color appeared on Paula's cheeks. "I am *not* skinny. I simply watch my weight."

"I fail to see why," I said pleasantly. "Apparently no man looks at you anyway."

"Butterball," she hissed.

"You'd have to buy a husband," I said, smiling faintly. "Is that what you plan to do some day?"

"Children, children," my mother scolded. "Must you always squabble?" She rapped the table with a spoon. "Harold, drink your coffee. It's almost time for you to leave."

I glanced at my watch. It was eight-fifteen. "Do we have a flashlight in the house?"

"I think so," my mother said. "It should be in the utility closet."

I found the flashlight, removed the two batteries, and went downstairs into the basement.

The bomb had been set to go off at four-thirty yesterday, but when I had heard no news concerning it either on television or the radio, I finally came to the conclusion that it had failed to go off.

I had been forced to go to the Twelfth Avenue bus terminal and retrieve it. The police have ingenious laboratory techniques and I certainly didn't want them to recover a whole bomb. There was no telling what it might reveal to them.

Now I substituted the two batteries and tried the mechanism. Yes, this time it worked perfectly. I wiped all the parts of the bomb with my handkerchief and then put on gloves to re-assemble it. I set the timer for one-thirty in the afternoon and put the bomb in a cardboard shoe box. I tore a section of paper from the roll of butcher's wrapping paper, and securely wrapped and bound the package.

I suspected that I would have to waterproof my next bomb.

The package was perfectly safe

to handle, but nevertheless I carried it gingerly upstairs and put it on the breakfast table. "Take this to the Sixty-Eighth Avenue Bus Terminal. It's set to go off at one-thirty."

Paula grimaced. "Couldn't you choose a better neighborhood? That's practically Skid Row. A woman isn't safe on the streets."

"You'll have nothing to worry about," I said acidly.

My mother sighed. "How long before we blow up Uncle Martin?"

"I'll do that next week," I said. "But even after that we'll have to distribute a few more bombs. We don't want the police to suspect that there is a logical motive for the bombings. After all, we stand to inherit almost a million dollars."

"I wish you'd let *me* blow up Uncle Martin," Paula said wistfully.

I suspected that there was something Freudian in that.

"No," I said sternly. "We all know that the only place Uncle Martin ever goes to is the Turkish bath. *I* will plant that bomb."

"About how many men do you think fit the picture?" O'Brien asked.

"That's hard to say. It would be nice if we had cards on everybody in this area and could just run

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them through an IBM machine. But I'd estimate about thirty thousand."

"That's still a lot of people and they're scattered all over."

Walters conceded that.

I did manage to do the Evans account by five o'clock.

When I arrived home at quarter to six, Sergeant Walters had just finished putting his car in the garage.

I don't know too much about him except that he seems to have some kind of a desk job with the police force.

He nodded to me and went on to the house.

We have been sharing the same garage and living in the same duplex for ten years and yet I doubt if he would recognize me on the street.

It is one of the pathetic aspects of my life.

No one seems to notice me.



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